

FLORA AND FAUNA

The native plants and animals of Onslow County are characteristic of the Atlantic Coastal Plain, a biological and geological province that stretches from southeastern Massachusetts to Florida. The county contains an exceptionally diverse flora and fauna due to the number and quality of natural communities present, and to the naturally high species richness of some of these communities. Because of this habitat diversity and species richness, there are a large number of rare plants and animals that are native to the county. Among these are 78 plant species (Table 3) and 52 animal species (Table 4) that are recognized as rare at the Federal or State level. The rare plants comprise 73 flowering plants, three ferns, one moss, and one lichen. The rare animals comprise three mammals, 10 birds, 10 reptiles, two amphibians, one fish, and 26 invertebrates.

Onslow County contains highly significant populations for some of these rare plants and animals. Two plant species--rough-leaf loosestrife (*Lysimachia asperulifolia*) and Cooley's meadowrue (*Thalictrum cooleyi*)--are listed as Federal and State Endangered, and seabeach amaranth (*Amaranthus pumilus*) is listed as Federal and State Threatened. Another 14 plants are recognized as Federal Species of Concern due to their global rareness. Hirsts' witch grass (*Dichanthelium* sp. 1 = *Panicum hirstii*) is currently known from three global populations, two of which are in Camp Lejeune (the other is in Delaware). Onslow County also contains significant percentages of the current global distribution of three plants associated with the Pine Savanna Very Wet Clay Variant: savanna onion (*Allium* sp. 1 - 38%), golden sedge (*Carex lutea* - 33%), and Cooley's meadowrue (27%). The county also appears to contain the world's largest populations of Venus flytrap (*Dionaea muscipula*), awned meadow-beauty (*Rhexia aristosa*), and Thorne's beaksedge (*Rhynchospora thornei*). The county also contains one of three known populations for a recently described quillwork (*Isoetes microvela*), and three of four currently known populations for an undescribed goldenrod (*Solidago* sp. 1). The county also supports the only currently known populations in North Carolina for many-flowered grass pink (*Calopogon multiflorus*), Hirsts' witch grass, sand spikerush (*Eleocharis montevidensis*), and Florida yellow-eyed-grass (*Xyris difformis* var. *floridana*).

Four animals occurring in Onslow County are listed as Federal and State Endangered: eastern cougar (*Felis concolor concolor*), leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*), and manatee (*Trichechus manatus*). Three animals are Federal and State Threatened: loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*), and green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*). Another nine animals are recognized as Federal Species of Concern due to their global rareness. Among these most significant rare animals, the eastern cougar is known only historically from the county and the manatee is an occasional summer visitor; the other rare animal species have intermittent to permanent breeding populations.

The rare plants and animals found in Onslow County occur in a variety of habitats, with individual species tending to be restricted to one or few natural community types. Coastal areas, particularly beaches and tidal marshes, are critical for several rare birds and reptiles, but the majority of rare plants and animals in Onslow County occur in the diverse Pine Savanna and Wet Pine Flatwoods natural communities, and in the often adjacent Small Depression Pond natural community.